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The *mkitkhavi* are diviners. A *mkitkhavi* can be a man or a woman, although they are more often women than men. The *mkitkhavi* tells of the future, using water, grain, or beans as media, or by winding and unwinding a piece of thread on a plank, and by many other manipulations.

The *mkitkhavi* may sometimes even be attendants at the Khevsur sanctuary (*dekanozi*).[44] In such case the relatives of a sick person who seek the help of the diviner (the *dekanozi*) are obliged to bring a sheep to him; he kills the animal and performs the rite called "the washing of hands and shoulders" (in the Georgian, *khel-mkhris dabana,* from the words *kheli*—hand; *mkhari*—shoulder; and the verb *dabana,* meaning "to wash"). The meaning of this custom is based on the belief that the blood of the slain animal will wash away the afflictions of the sick person.

It is necessary to note that not only a *dekanoz*—a servant of the distorted and heathen religion of the Khevsurs—but even the priests of the Greek Catholic Church did not shy at the business of divination.

The different manners of divination, like many other customs and practices—such as the bringing of special sacrifices to the *Khati,* funeral and commemorative ceremonies, curing of diseases, etc.—are founded on the belief of the people in the existence of spirits (both good and evil), and upon their cult of the dead.[1] And we believe that these religious observances account for the widespread customs of hospitality among the Georgians, which will be discussed in the ensuing chapter.[2]

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[44] Eirstov: 101-2.

[1] [see cat 116, p 42 ff -- Analyst]

[2] [cat 116, p 53 ff -- Analyst]

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nachvlash by the commoners reached 120 rubles, and among the *aznauri*, 240 rubles. Although the payment of the *nachvlash* was forbidden by the authorities in 1885, it did not cease to be practiced by the people.

In spite of the existence of the obligatory payment of the bride-price by the Svan groom, we cannot consider this practice as marriage by purchase, because of the large amount of dowry given to the bride by her relatives.

After the payment of the *nakdanur* and the *nachvlash*, the bride is regarded as belonging to the groom. In case of her desertion or the breaking of their word by the bride's parents, the result is a blood feud or the return of everything given to the bride in addition to the payment of indemnity. Thus marriage among the Svans, as among the other Georgian Highlanders, has the character of a legal business transaction—a contract.

The dowry (*mzithvi*) which the bride brings to the home of her husband, usually exceeds the bride-price. The dowry is formed usually of cattle (cows, horses, sheep), large copper cooking pots, clothing and adornments for the bride such as ear-rings, beads, rings, etc. Land is given as a dowry only when the bride-price (*nachvlash*) is paid by the groom in land. In addition to the dowry, the bride brings with her two oxen-loads of bread and brandy for the relatives of the groom.

Considering the large amount of dowry and the additional expense necessary for the marriage ceremonies which falls heavily upon the bride's family, it is not difficult to understand the current opinion among the Svans that a woman is a source of great expense and material loss for the entire family. This fact, together with the economic conditions of the country, may be were responsible for the practice of infanticide by the Svans, when newborn baby girls were put to death.

The reason for the preference given to boys over girls as expressed in the custom of infanticide is not difficult to comprehend if, in addition to the facts stated above, one takes into consideration the structure of the social organization where every male member is not only the defender of the material and moral interests of the family but is also the sustainer of its physical existence and the

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guaranty of its propagation. The son is also the caretaker and guardian of the ancestor-worship—the cult of the dead, upon whose good will is believed to depend the well-being and the very existence of the family. Accordingly, the father sees in his son not only the supporter in his lifetime but also the guarantor of the peaceful rest of his soul after death.

Besides the economic causes, Professor M. Kovalevsky[16] sees also the influence of socio-political factors responsible for the custom of infanticide, especially in the Princely Svanetia. The inhabitants of this part of the country convinced the author that the subordinate position of the common people and the power of the ruling princes, *Dadeshkeliani,* to seize and put into service or sell into slavery every girl of common birth, was the main reason for the existence of the custom of infanticide in the Princely Svanetia.[a] On the other hand, the people in Free Svanetia,[a] blamed the difficult economic conditions as the sole cause of the custom.

Although the girl was put to death soon after her birth, the birth of a boy, on the contrary, was the occasion of joy and special celebration.

There were different ways of putting the children to death, such as choking them with hot ashes, strangulation, placing a stone on the stomach, starving them to death by leaving them without any food.[17]

The investigators and travelers who visited the country of the Svans report the existence of infanticide among them and discuss it, expressing their opinions concerning the possible causes of this custom.

Thus the Frenchman, Raphael Bernoville, sees the cause of the custom in economic conditions, the absence in the family of the means to feed and raise the girls. As to the manner of putting the babies to death, he mentions the practice of choking them with ashes. He writes concerning the subject:[18] "Les femmes étant considerées par eux comme des bouches inutiles, lorsque les naissances excédaient le nombre utile des membres de la famille

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[16] Kovalevsky: a, II, 41-4.
[17] Stoianov: 435.
[18] Bernoville: 103.

[a] [see cat 116, p 4 for Swa- territorial divisions -- Analyst]

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If we examine this "custom" and take the facts connected with it as they are in reality at the present time, or were not long ago in the Caucasus, without constructing artificial theories we come to the conclusion that marriage by capture and abduction is not the relic of an ancient institution but the origin and very existence of this "custom" are traceable to various economic, religious, and psycho-sociological factors. Thus in Svanetia the economic conditions were chiefly responsible for the practice of infanticide, which in its turn was the principal cause of bride-stealing and abduction. In addition to the economic causes, the procedure of the marriage ceremonies, particularly the authority of parents in the matchmaking, led to and kept in existence the practice of bride-abduction and marriage by capture, which were mostly accomplished by mutual consent and previous arrangement of the young people, a practice prevailing among all groups of Georgian Highlanders. Therefore the marriage by abduction or by capture in the Caucasus was in many instances a love match; a marriage based on the mutual love of the young couple acting in defiance of the rigid rules of custom and parental will, and according to their own will and sexual inclination; or, on the other hand, we have the abduction of a woman by force, without her consent, as in the previous case. Here we have, as a motive for abduction, the feeling of one party only—the man—who, blinded by passion, adopts a "devil-may-care" attitude, ignoring the usual consequences of such an act, the inevitable blood-feud. So, analyzing the cases of bride abduction among the Georgian Highlanders, we come to the conclusion that they are motivated not by custom but by personal inclinations of the persons involved, who act, not according to custom, but from sheer necessity. Consequently, marriage by capture is not a "custom," but a necessity; because "the word custom is used to apply to the totality of behavior patterns which are carried by tradition and lodged in the group, as contrasted with the more random personal activities of the individual."[22]

We may follow without difficulty the fact proving the validity of our opinion that, with the growing personal liberty of young people and the diminishing power of parental authority in

[22] Sapir: 658. [i.e. marriage by capture—Author]

583 arranging marriages, the number of marriages by abduction is
182 diminishing rapidly in the various communities.

[784] It should be noted, also, that the practice of firing guns, as part of the wedding ceremony, is not an indication of the earlier custom of marriage by abduction, when the groom and his kinsmen frequently had to use their firearms; but is merely of religio-magical origin. It is done, as the people believe, to keep the evil spirits away from the married pair.

585 In examining the marriage procedure as performed by the Svans, we discussed briefly the ceremonies of matchmaking and betrothal and the facts connected with them.[1] After the betrothal the wedding ceremony takes place.

Among the Svans the wedding is performed by their illiterate priests, called *papi*. The procedure is a mixture of the Christian ceremonies of the Georgian Church and additional rites which originated in the people's superstition and phantasy. Thus, for example, instead of holding crowns over the heads of the marrying couple, as in the Georgian Church, the Svans use chintz caps specially made for the occasion. The prayers are read in the Georgian language but their meaning is not understood by the people. One prayer is interwoven with another and badly distorted. As a characteristic feature of the ceremony, we must note the ceremonial kissing of the bride and groom, and the sewing of their garments with a needle by the *papi*.

After the wedding ceremony the celebration is arranged in the house of the groom. The bride is led into the house with veiled face. The veil is discarded at the entrance after the bride passes the threshold. The bride passes under crossed daggers—a universal custom among all Georgians and practiced as a protection against the evil spirits. The bride is met in the door by the near relatives of the groom with a cup full of wheat flour—the symbol of abundance and prosperity. The bride takes the cup and slowly walks with it in her hands around the room. Then she is led to the cup containing honey, which she must taste by dipping her finger in it. This custom of giving honey to the bride is universal among all groups of the Georgian nation, and may be interpreted as the symbol of a sweet future conjugal life. After

[1] [See cat. 116, p 77 -- Analyst]
[2] [See cat. 116, p 78 ff -- Analyst]

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fifteen bottles.[26] Among the Svans, for the commemoration ceremonies for the dead, the relatives of the deceased person bring, from every home, thirty small loaves of bread, called *lekhde*. These loaves are for consumption during the feast;[27] or the Svans,[28] before the commemoration celebration, visit all the relatives and collect the necessary supplies for the feast.

From the examples given in this chapter, we notice that in every group and community is found a clearly marked group solidarity expressed in reciprocal assistance and co-operation. We see that this phenomenon is evident not only in the field and home work, but is manifested by all groups of the Georgian nation —by Highlanders and Lowlanders alike, in every manner of life, in the customs connected with childbirth as well as in wedding ceremonies and funerals, and in time of danger everyone finds protection and refuge among his kinsmen. The last mentioned fact is clearly illustrated in the customs of blood-feud, where every offender is supported by his relatives; on the other hand, kinsmen of the victim seek redress and punishment of the culprit. In conclusion, we may admit that the social life of the communities among the Georgian Highlanders is based on a complex of customs, clearly defined and enforced by the group, co-ordinating and regulating the social and individual life of the people, creating between the members interdependence and symmetry of action, reciprocity with security, where every assistance is accordingly returned and repaid.

[see cat. III p. 162 ff. -- Analyst]

[26] Radde: d, 87.
[27] Eristov: b, 41.
[28] Stoinav: 439.